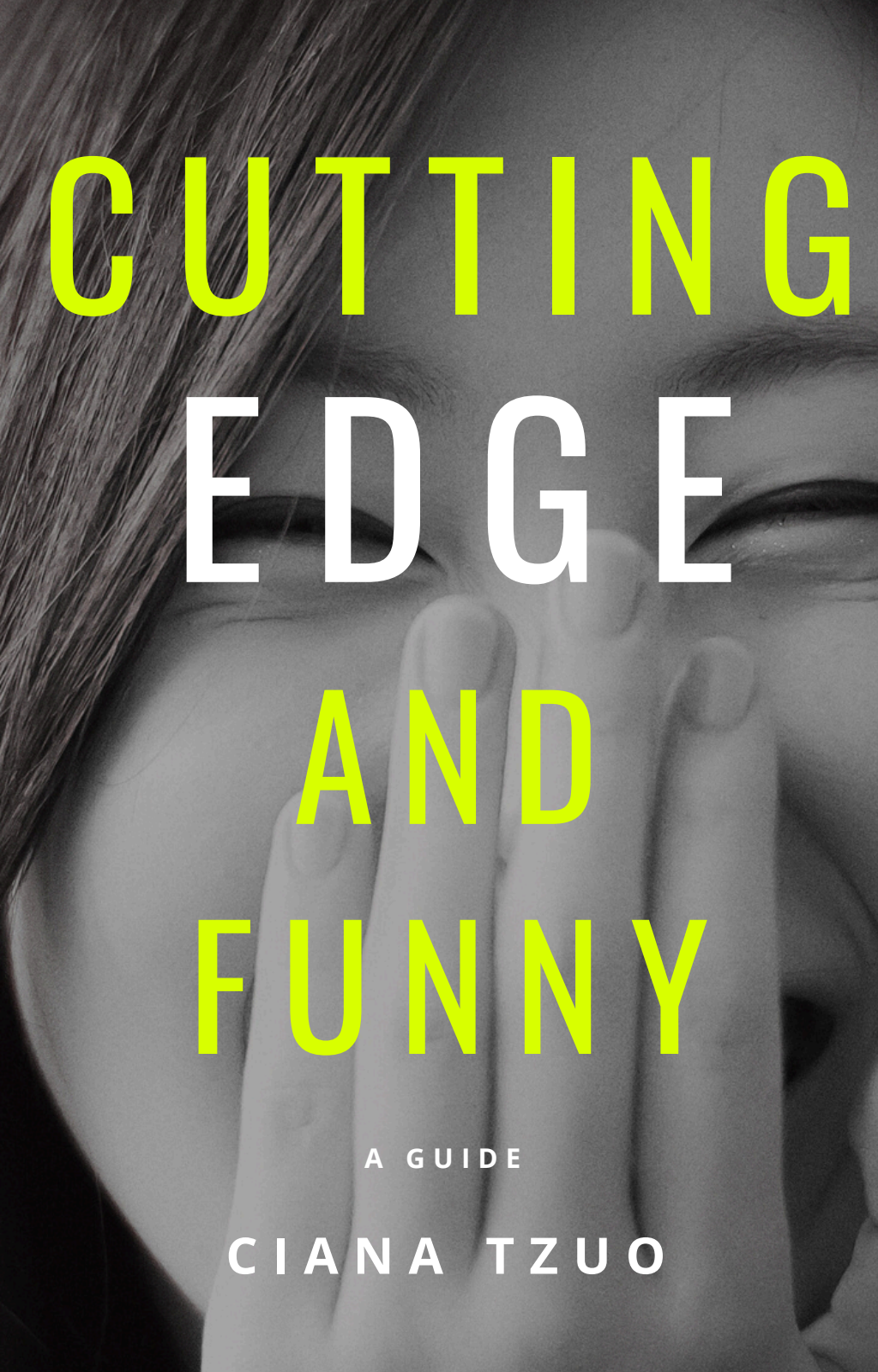

CUTTING
EDGE
AND
FUNNY
A GUIDE
CIANA TZUO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I:
How to be funny

Foundations of Comedy
What is Tech Comedy?
Understanding the Tech landscape
Tech Lingo & Concepts

Part II:
How to be careful while being funny

Can you separate art and artist?
Public Perception & Cultural Impact of Comedy

PART I

HOW TO BE FUNNY



CHAPTER ONE

Foundations of Comedy

What makes something funny?

> *Comedy is an art form that seeks to entertain, amuse, and evoke laughter in a way that subverts expectations to reveal the absurdity in the ordinary.*

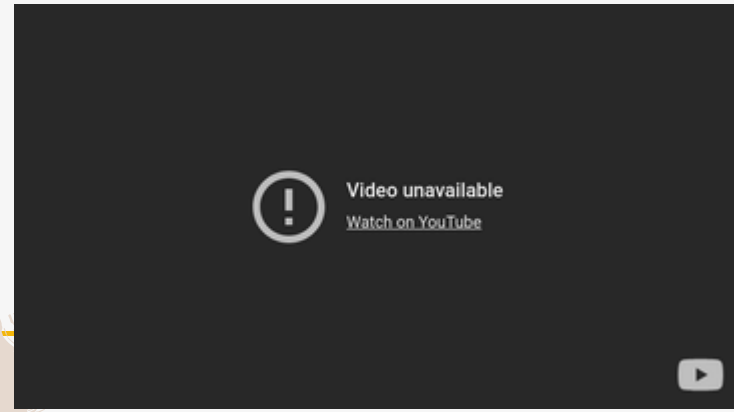
Types of Skits

Repetition

Using one joke multiple times but escalating the joke as you repeat. Have a moment of clarity or normalness in between, before escalating the joke one last time.



Same play on the joke that Google is a guy but the search results by people get more and more ridiculous



A couple is fighting through text while typing their messages through Siri. The argument and jokes by Siri escalates as the fighting becomes more intense

Types of Skits

Satire

Exaggerated humor where the roles of situation are switched to show the absurdity of the situation



Satire play on how all tech commercials sound and are edited the same

Satire on white people in hip pop and GenZ slang



Types of Skits

Fish out of water

Someone / something thati s somewhere they do not belong or fit in



Shows a typical couple meeting their new eccentric neighbors and feels very out of place



Shows an elderly person out of his element when going through a drive thru

Types of Skits

Parody

Imitating another work (like creating a spoof)



Kylo Ren goes undercover as an employee in Starkiller Base. The skit is a spoof on Undercover Boss and Star Wars

Spoof of Twilight with zombies / frankenstein instead of vampires



Sketch Comedy Structure

5 Point Structure

1. *World with reasonable base reality: an environment with built in expectations*
2. *Contrasted with an unusual behavior*
3. *“Raise the stakes” - that behavior is heightened and explored*
4. *Truthful moment/reality comes back*
5. *Ending that subverts the pattern or agrees with it*

Testing out the 5-Point Structure



Establishes a base reality that looks similar to an Amazon commercial but introduces a product designed for elderly users. The built in expectation is that the device is helpful and intuitive.

The unusual behavior of the Echo SIlver is that it responds hilariously to the elderly characters' quirks and misunderstandings (such as calling "Alexa" random names)

The stakes are raised as the situations get more ridiculous and the requests by elderly are harder to understand

Despite the absurdity, the skit is grounded in the truth that the elderly usually have a hard time with new technology

Ends by going back to the world of the ad



CHAPTER TWO

What is Tech Comedy

Tech Comedy (*short for Technology Comedy*) ***is a genre of humor that explores and satirizes the quirks, frustrations, and absurdities of technology and its impact on modern life. By poking fun at how technology shapes our behaviors, relationships, and societies, tech comedy makes complex or intimidating subjects more approachable and relatable.***

Why Tech Humor Matters

Technology increasingly shapes our daily lives as the tech industry continuously grows and expands into modern pop culture. Most jokes and media online are rooted in references to existing and groundbreaking technology and it is important for people to understand its presence and to stay connected to the evolving world in which we live.

Tech humor and comedy engage and educate people in the complications and quirks of our daily digital lives through lighthearted methods. It helps you to understand the fast changes in technology and shows that frustrations and anxieties about technology can be funny and relatable.

Humor is one of the easiest and most accessible ways to engage people in a topic and help them understand it. Tech comedy entertains and promotes connections and reflection and shared understanding in a tech-driven world.

CHAPTER THREE

Understanding the Tech Landscape



Common themes to understand as they show up pretty often:

Tech taking over daily life

Frustrations with the unreliability of tech

Privacy and surveillance

Tech encroaching on privacy

Social media & digital culture brainrot

Generational divide in technology

Startups & Silicon Valley culture

Tech taking over daily life







Frustrations with the unreliability of tech







Humor is mankind's greatest blessing.

Mark Twain

What tends to work & where?

Breaking down audience interest geographically

Globally Popular

Social Media & Brainrot
Widely relatable and almost understood by everyone who uses social media

Frustrations with Unreliable Tech
Everyday annoyances like slow Wi-Fi or autocorrect transcend cultural and demographic difference

AI/Tech Taking Over Daily Life
Robots, automation, and AI taking over resonates in an era of rapid technological progress and job displacement fears

Cultural specifics like TikTok bans in some regions or local platforms like WeChat (China) require changing and adaptation

What tends to work & where?



Startups and Silicon Valley Culture:

- Works better in the U.S. (more specifically California, or states close to the Silicon Valley) where tech startups and innovation is prominent

Big Tech Monopolies

- Companies like Google, Amazon, and Facebook control everything

Smart Homes

- Over-reliance on Alexa and Siri



What tends to work & where?



Super Apps and Mobile Payment Systems

- Platforms like Wechat (China), Gojek (Indonesia), or Paytm (India) dominate daily life from paying to chatting with friends

Tech Surveillance and Privacy

- Some countries in Asia have extensive high tech surveillance

Gaming Culture

- Huge gaming scenes and obsession in South Korea, Japan, and China

What tends to work & where?





GDPR and Data Privacy

- Europe's strict privacy laws (General Data Protection Regulation) are seen as overly bureaucratic by many

Tech Skepticism

- Europeans are generally more cautious about embracing new tech compared to the U.S.

Public Transport and Tech Integration

- There are efficient tech-driven systems in places like Germany or the Netherlands

Why does geography matter?

Geography matters as jokes about certain topics may fall flat or garner a different reaction, for example surveillance in Asia is usually seen as likehearted while it may be viewed more seriously in other regions.



What tends to work on who?

Breaking down audience interest by age

Older Audiences (**Gen X, Boomers**)

Relate more to generational divide jokes or frustrations with unreliable tech

Privacy and tech takeover topics resonate more with older demographics



Younger Audiences (**Gen Z, Millennials**)

Respond more to jokes about social media, brainrot, memes, and tech slang

Appreciate humor about startups and Silicon Valley culture

CHAPTER FOUR

Tech Lingo & Concepts



The Cloud - Remote servers where data is stored and accessed online

Joke? People don't know where it is



Wi-Fi - Wireless internet

Joke? Having slow connections, forgetting passwords, or how reliant we are on it



Bug - A flaw or glitch in software

Joke? Usually used to describe an error or mistake

Lag - The delay in data transform, common in gaming or video calls when there is slow internet connection

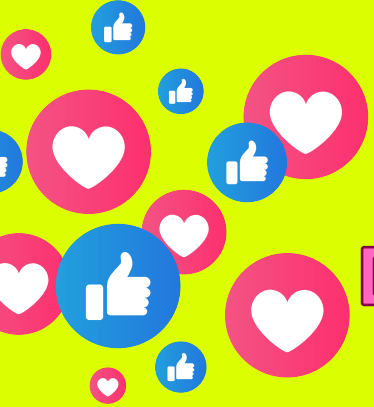


Joke? Often important sometimes gets lost in translation when there is a lag

404 Error - Page not found. Symbolic of anything missing or broken.



Joke? Used colloquially as a way of saying something is not working



Social Media & Digital Culture

Algorithms

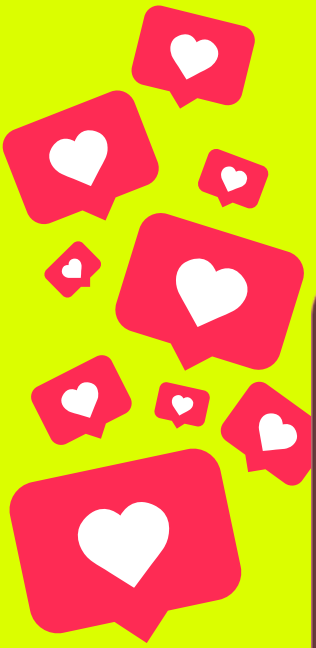
- A program that can learn your preferences and determine what content you want to see
- **Joke? Used in the context of talking about social media company surveillance**

Going Viral

- Content that gains a lot of views and spread rapidly online
- **Joke? Used to show something has a lot of popularity**



Social Media & Digital Culture



Clickbait

- Often misleading headlines meant to grab attention and gain clicks
- **Joke? Make fun of egregious clickbaits or joking at how effective they are**

DM (Direct Message)

- Private messaging on social platforms
- **Joke? Used as sliding into DMs**

Influencer

- Someone who earns a living by promoting products on social media
- **Joke? Making fun of influencer culture and social media**

AI & AUTOMATION

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

=

Machines that can learn and process information, simulating human intelligence

|

Joke? Most of the time, AI isn't as smart as people think

Chatbot

=

Automated messaging system that pretends to be a human

|

Joke? Chatbots may act like humans on the surface but are highly inflexible



CYBER SECURITY & PRIVACY

Hack
Gaining access to a system by exploiting vulnerabilities

Joke? Usually laughing at how easy/hard something is able to hack

Phishing
Fraudulent attempts to steal sensitive information

Joke? Hackers attempting to steal user information through fake contacts



Virtual Social Protocols & Generation Gaps



Different ways to use different social media platforms

Joke? Some applications, like Facebook, are only used by older generations

Double texting

Joke? often used to denote desperation in women

Emoji usage

Joke? Inappropriate emoji usage

Part II



How to be careful while being funny

(or vice versa!)



Comedy can touch on many usually controversial subjects, and there is a thin line between a joke and an insulting comment. Learning the act of reading the audience and presenting jokes in the correct way is very important.

Comedy serves as a medium to educate, provoke, thought and entertain by addressing serious topics in a way that is more accessible and relatable. While these topics in other situations may not elicit laughter, comedy allows people to engage with them through humor.

The challenge, however, lies in managing the delicate balance between “laughing with” versus “laughing at.” This tension raises questions about whether we should separate a comedian’s work from their personal actions and where the ethical boundaries of comedy lie



CHAPTER FIVE

Can you separate art and artist?

One perspective:

The Artist and their art cannot be separated.

Ethical Responsibility & Accountability of the Viewer

A comedian's personal behavior, especially if harmful to other people, cannot be separated from their work. For the audience, consuming their content can feel like endorsing or allowing problematic or dangerous behavior. Audiences have a responsibility to hold entertainers accountable by refusing to normalize harmful behavior.





Impact & Influence on Industry and Society

Rewarding success to individuals who have caused harm spreads the idea that society values entertainment over integrity.

Overlooking misconduct contributes to a culture where immoral behavior can be excused if the person is talented or successful.



Case Study

Michael Richards

Michael Richards, best known for his role as Kramer from *Seinfeld*, attempted a career in stand-up comedy after the show ended. In 2006, during a performance at the Laugh Factory in Los Angeles, Richards responded to a heckler by launching into a racist tirade, repeatedly using the N-word and making derogatory remarks about Black people. The incident was filmed and quickly went viral, sparking outrage across the entertainment industry and the public.



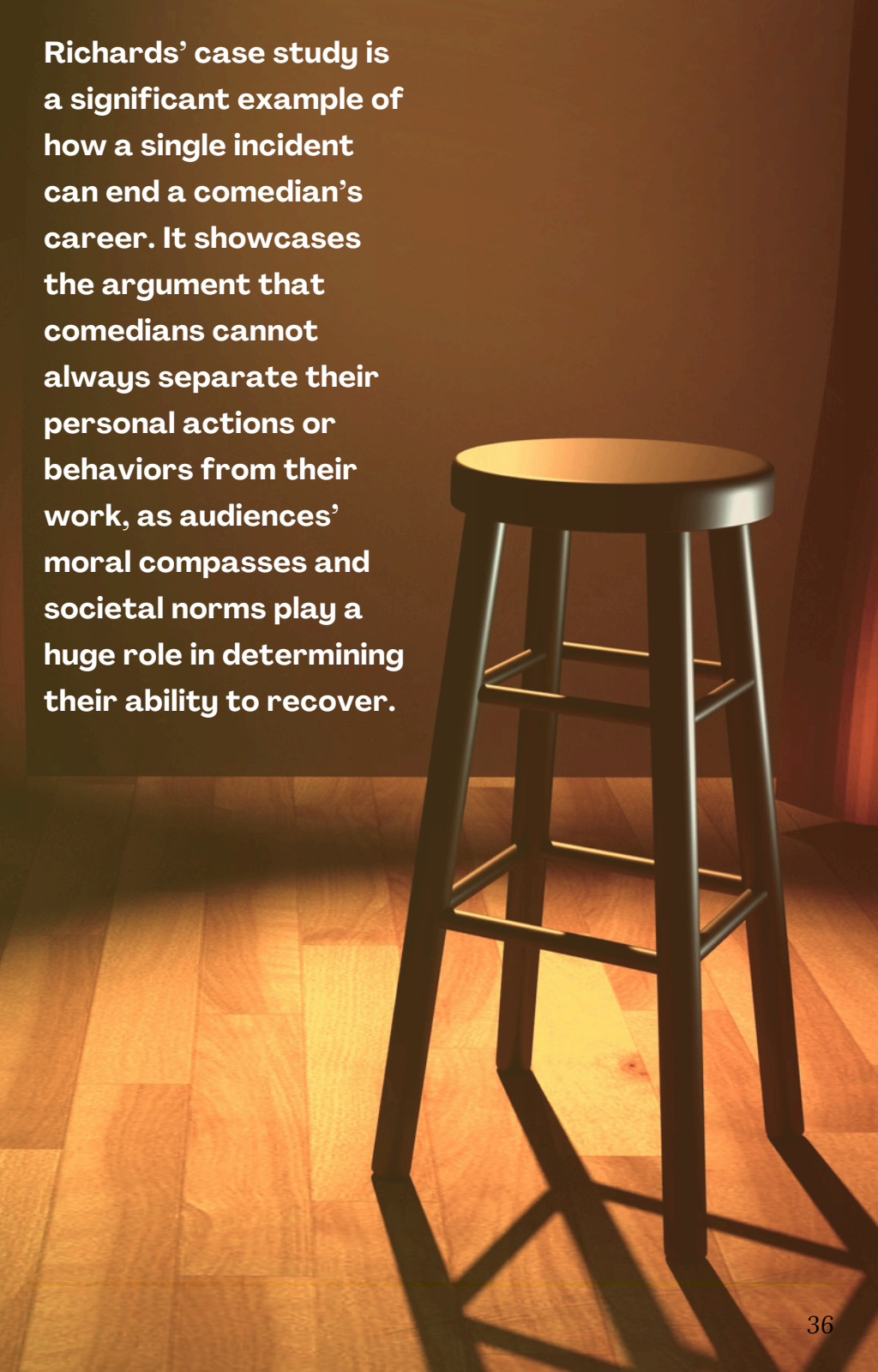
Despite issuing a public apology, including a heavily criticized appearance on The Late Show with David Letterman where he attempted to explain his actions, the backlash was severe, and Richards essentially disappeared from the comedy scene.

Since the incident, he has not attempted to make a significant return. Unlike other comedians who faced controversy and found ways to bounce back, Richards' incident was seen as irreparable. The incident damaged his public image so extensively that audiences were unwilling to separate the incident from his comedic persona.

In the context of the times (early days of viral video culture), this event showcased the shift of how racism in comedy was perceived by the public, where audiences demanded greater accountability for harmful behavior.

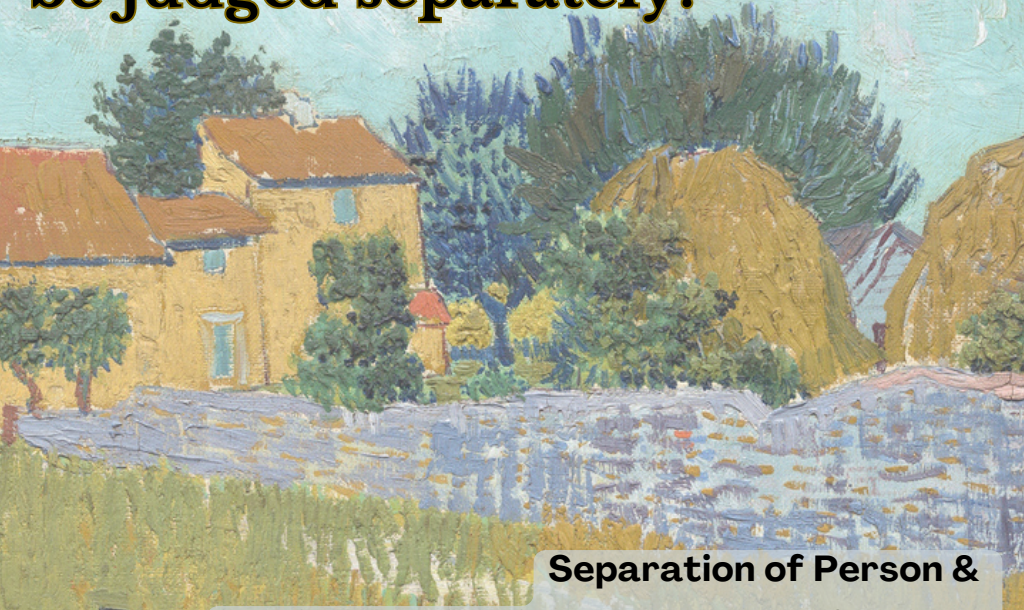


Richards' case study is a significant example of how a single incident can end a comedian's career. It showcases the argument that comedians cannot always separate their personal actions or behaviors from their work, as audiences' moral compasses and societal norms play a huge role in determining their ability to recover.



Another perspective:

The art and the Artist should be judged separately.





Separation of Person & Their Contributions In Other Professions

Many people separate personal misconduct from professional contributions in other industries, such as politics, business, and sports. If we can separate personal behavior from professional contributions in these fields, why not in entertainment or comedy? If a joke is funny and ethical, can it not be enjoyed independently of the comedian's personal conduct? Once art is created, it can be interpreted by the audience and enjoyed separately from the artist's personal life.



Ethical Content Matters More than Artist's Personal Conduct

If the comedy itself does not perpetuate harm (e.g., does not include racist, sexist, or offensive jokes), it can be appreciated regardless of the comedian's personal actions.

Content should be judged by its own merits, for example if a comedian delivers a clever, though-provoking routine, the comedian's personal life should not interfere with the quality of the content. Especially if the comedian's actions do not directly impact their work and audience, it can be argued that their personal behavior is irrelevant to enjoying their work.



Case Study

DAVE CHAPELLE

Dave Chappelle has had a long history of including provocative social commentary in his comedy. Chappelle faced backlash for his Netflix special The Closer, where he made a joke about the LGBTQ+ community, and declared himself a label associated with controversial views about gender.

> **To what extent do I have to participate in your self image?**
>
> — Dave Chappelle

While some fans saw his joke as a critique of cancel culture and free speech, others thought he was perpetuating harmful stereotypes on the trans community.

While the backlash caused some criticism, most fans and other comedians defended him, citing the nuanced nature of his humor and his intentions of not being inherently anti-trans.



> **You know you must be doing something right if old people like you.**
>
> — Dave Chappelle

CHAPTER SIX

Public Perception & Cultural Impact of Comedy





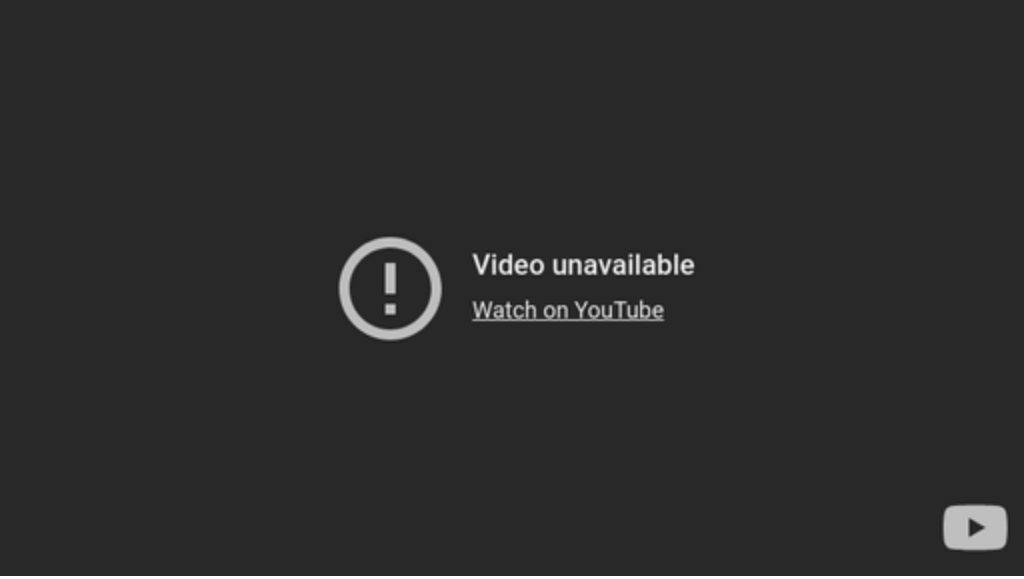
Certain themes or topics are universally sensitive and require care.

- Making fun of insecurities, race, gender, sexuality, or traumatic events such as rape or abuse
- Jokes that lack context or setup and are simply offensive or inappropriate statements (e.g. usage of slurs)
- Using comedy to propagate hate speech or political propaganda

An important rule is to learn to differentiate between laughing at versus laughing with. Ethical comedy invites audiences to laugh with others to create a shared humor while exploring societal topics, rather than laughing at someone in a derogatory or harmful way.

Comedy's Lasting Cultural Impact





Charlie Chaplin - The Great Dictator (1940)

Chaplin used a satirical portrayal of Adolf Hitler and fascism during a time of rising authoritarianism to critique the absurdity and dangers of dictatorship. He blended comedy with political commentary.

Legacy: The film is a classic example of how satire can be used to address serious issues. Chaplin's piece has inspired modern political satire, from Saturday Night Live sketches to The Daily Show.





Lenny Bruce's Stand-Up Comedy (1950s-1960s)

Known as the "father of modern comedy", Bruce pushed the boundaries of what was discussed, often clashing with authorities for his routines about religion, politics, and sexuality.

Legacy: Bruce paved the way for comedians to be able to address controversial topics without fear of censorship. His routines became a symbol of free speech and a push for broader societal topics in comedy.



Richard Pryor's Stand-Up Comedy (1970s-1980s)

Pryor's comedy tackled topics of race and systemic injustice based on his own personal experiences and struggles around racism and addiction.

Legacy: Pryor transformed stand-up comedy into a platform for personal and societal truth-telling and helped normalize the discussion of race in the entertainment industry and society as a whole. His work influenced many generations of comedians.

SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE

(1975-Present)

SNL pioneered sketch comedy on television, combining reflections and critiques on current events, politics, and pop culture with comedic routines

Legacy: SNL is still producing skits today, influencing public perception of current events, celebrities, and political figures. It has continued to serve as a comedic barometer for American culture.



MEMES AND INTERNET COMEDY

With the rise of the internet, comedy has been democratized, becoming more accessible to create and watch.



Early internet viral culture on platforms like Vine, TikTok, and Twitter have helped launch careers of many comedians (e.g., Bo Burnham, Sarah Cooper).

Memes have become a language of their own, shaping public discourse and political satire. The format continues to redefine comedy and the way it is shared and consumed.